1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

463 cattle, the butcher, expert at pig killing and skinning (pigs are regularly butchered on the small farms), the expert at rigging the great hayricks which stand in the farmers' haggards, and, lately, the threshing machine experts. All these robust, outdoor specialists are male. The feminine sphere of life does not seem to have bred such specialization. Yet many women were known also for their special skill at this and that branch of women's work and were consulted accordingly. Nevertheless, the only traditionally feminine crafts to develop and flourish apart were witchcraft and midwifery.

754 759

A local craft or proficiency seems to develop out of some special crucial activity in local life. A local craft or skill of the kind that meets us here builds up directly out of social life itself. It is a development of habitual association about any person who gradually builds a reputation for a particular proficiency. The proficiency may center around some traditionally established technique of peasant life, like the weaving of homespun and shawls, the clothing of the small farmers, or else it may build up about local conventions having no direct economic value. Dances, gambles, and other entertainments and ceremonies of local social life may likewise afford areas in which a special skill gains recognition, gradually to grow into an occupation.

Thus the local specialists included fiddlers, singers, poets, storytellers. In the last century, in a day of great poverty and much displacement from the land, each of these skills gave an occupation to many wanderers along the roads of Ireland. Their followers found employment in the rural communities among the small farmers. Even itinerant dancing masters once flourished in the country districts during Carleton's day.[8]

The existence of other conventions leads likewise to the

[8] Students of Gaelic culture have described these artists very amply. See Robin Flower, Daniel Corkery, *et al.*

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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us the first example of our method. An inquiry into the present of rural life leads us into the ways of human behaviour rather than into those of cultural descent.

I called my second example 'the old man's curse'. It is perhaps not so pleasant an example and it springs out of infinitely rarer occasions. Yet it will serve as well as did the west room to show us where our queries must lie. The example of the old man's curse concerns a lost eye. Many of the country-people believed that the curse was directly responsible for the loss of a young man's eye. The young man in question lived in a district not far from Luogh; and the old man who cursed him was a neighbour. This is the baldest possible statement of the occurrence, and it would suffice if we were interested merely in collecting instances of magical injury.

For the baneful effects of curses, of black magic, of the 'evil eye', are a commonplace of anthropological literature. They are common enough too in Irish folklore. Men suffer injury in some way from supernatural causes. The possessor of the evil eye can blight, maim, and kill; the priest's curse, though in this case uttered only for cause, can bring ruin upon a prosperous house; can turn an unbeliever's head upon his shoulder; strike blindness; and the shrill imprecations of old men and women, or the *rann* of a satiric poet, can bring equal harm. Supernatural injuries of this sort are as

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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old as the Celtic sagas. The belief is spread, of course, far beyond Ireland. The Neapolitan fisherman paints his boat against the evil eye, the Balkan woman embroiders her petticoat to ward off evil and curses. The West African sorcerer knows the technique to perfection; our own Pennsylvania Dutch 'hexes' are modern practitioners. For the belief belongs to the infinite realm of magic.

If one were satisfied with the bald collector's statement, one would be content to leave the young man in such company. But by inquiring more deeply into the incident, one can look into the situation in which he suffered. If the belief can be seen at work in a situation which can be readily assessed, then it will serve better as a guide toward understanding the life in which it can still operate.

The situation has many elements. In the first place, the details of the young man's trouble are simple enough. In working a scythe round the bush-choked wall of a field, he fell in such a way as to drive a sliver of bush into his eye. We should call it, I suppose, a simple accident and pity him his bad luck.

But the small farmers among whom he lived wove another world of explanation round that eye. Gradually the tale unfolds. Perhaps the loss of the eye is a punishment. For the young man was not entirely blameless. An unvoiced suspicion had pointed his way.

For there had been a few weeks before what used

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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754 578 888 to be called, in more heated days, 'an agrarian outrage'. Two old men, bachelors living alone, had been fired upon in the night. Some one had pumped gunshot through the window of their poor cabin, high up the mountainside. As was probably intended, the shots buried themselves harmlessly in the cabin floor. But they awakened the old men, and frightened them badly.

The occurrence shocked the community. The two old men were harmless creatures; they were 'saints' in the country phrase. Who would want to injure them or drive them out?

The country-people had their suspicions; but the police could get nothing from them. There was nothing for the inspector to do but report another 'agrarian intimidation'. Even if he too knew, there was nothing to do; he could prove nothing without witnesses.

The country-people kept silence for good reason, from their point of view. If their suspicions were correct, the matter was a private affair, a family squabble. It was no business of theirs.

For the old men, by the standards of rural kinship, were not entirely blameless either. They held a farm they did not work. They took none of their kinsmen in. They should long ago have given up their land. One of them should have brought a girl in, married her and raised a family. They should have passed the land on to their sons, or failing sons, they should have brought in a nephew

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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or other boy of their kindred. Then they could have turned the farm over to the boy, when they felt themselves too old, and let him marry, in order that their kindred's name continue and grow in land.

But the old men had never had a 'taste for marrying'. They were victims themselves of a too-intense loyalty. I say victims, because their loyalty had been narrowest of all. Their old mother had lived too long in her turn. She had never decided which one should get the land and bring in a girl. Perhaps their father might have decided, had he lived, but their mother survived him by many years. Neither of them wished to leave her side and neither would leave to make room for the other. When at last the mother died, the two bachelor sons were already old; they were long past marrying and set in celibate ways. They lingered on in an ever narrower round.

In the community they were 'saints', as I have said; they were 'no trouble to man or beast'. Yet, from another point of view, they were not doing the 'natural' thing; they made no provisions for their kinsmen; they did not pass on the land to those to whom by country right it should go. They refused to fill their proper roles in life. No wonder, then, that their cabin was a byword for neglect and disrepair. The countrymen would tell you, in a moralizing vein, it had become so 'for lack of a woman's hand'.

But to censure them for their misspent lives was

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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no affair of the community's. The kindred of the old men were the aggrieved parties. Their name suffered and their sons were landless and unborn; land belonging to them lay idle. So, whoever did the shooting—perhaps he had a reason for it. Suspicion might point here and there, but whatever measures the kinsmen might take to remedy their grievance concerned the kinsmen alone. Let those to whom the old men's duty lay see that they followed it. It was best to say nothing beyond one's immediate circle.

But the community could not entirely condone the shooting either. It was a bad thing, no good could come of it. To disturb the peace in such a way shook the security of them all; it gave the district 'a bad name'.

So, when a new event took place, the community found outlet for its censure. When the young man lost his eye, the community was ready for this reaffirmation of its threatened values. For the young man was one of the aggrieved kindred; he was a landless cousin's son; to him and his brothers the old men's farm should have gone. In the loss of his eye, the community felt he paid his penalty. No one knew just how it was inflicted; one does not attempt to unveil such mysteries. Their force is too great, too little controllable. Some felt the 'old man's curse' had done it, some felt that the priest might have done it, for the old men had appealed to him. Some blamed a vague mysterious power in the bush

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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the young man cut. Whatever it was, the fact was plain. Only a week or so after the shooting, the young man lost his eye. His crime found a sure punishment in a realm in which all could agree without running risk of retaliation at the hands of the disputing parties.

I have couched this incident in vague, unprecise language for a reason. In the realm of folk-belief outlines are not clear and concepts are not precise. No one could formulate logically this retribution which put out the young man's eye. Nevertheless all felt it. And a moralist among them could sum up: "It is right to respect the old people".

The second example, then, points in the same direction as the first. Both 'west room' and the 'old man's curse' reflect age-old tradition. But both reveal a system of values which rules life in the present. That system of values dictates attitudes and reflects itself in behaviour. For example, neither the young man who may or may not have done the shooting, nor the old men who were shot at, were free agents. They both followed interests growing out of the values of rural life. Sometimes, as in this case, these interests conflict. If open fighting is not to tear life asunder, ways must be found to resolve the conflict, to find a formula of agreement, as the diplomats say.

I have tried in the last of my two examples to show you something of the movements of this sort and something of the agreement which can be

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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234 776 789 told by a Clare farmer of friends of his, whose house he named:

"Two men return from a fair to the house of one 234 of them to have breakfast. There the woman was 776 churning, but no butter would come. The first of 789 the men suggested maybe they [the men] were 539 holding it up, and they left the house, but with no result, for when they returned there was still no butter. Upon finding out that an old woman, a stranger, had borrowed a bit of milk the day before, the first man closed the doors, took a ploughshare and held it in the turf fire. Soon there came a knock at the door, and after the third knock the woman of the house went to it. Then an old woman's hand passed a jug of milk through the crack of the door and a voice said: 'put this back in the churn'. She did so, and immediately all the milk turned to good butter."

But the farmer knows, too, that the fairies do not 776 always work alone. There is often a human agency ●754 involved along with theirs. Here one enters the really dangerous 'pisherogues', the practices of wicked magic. A human being may perform a rite or omit a precaution in such a way as to bring about a visitation of ill-luck and disaster. He may transfer disease and sickness from his own farm to the next, he may steal the butter of another's churn, he may destroy, steal, maim and kill by inducing the supernatural powers to commit the havoc.

776 789 But sometimes the human being who brings

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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776 789 brought into the scope of belief. They become repositories of 'power'. They come to carry in their own substance the same supernatural efficacy for good or evil which belongs to the good people.

754 776 789 So, when the good people strike, the countryman who still follows the old folklore is not unprepared. If butter fails to come, for instance, he can take a hearth-coal and sear the bottom of the churn. He can apply iron in a variety of forms; for "there is great power in iron". He can use a hazel-stick, of the kind used in driving cattle, to cure cattle, or to give relief from sickness. He can ward off the disease that has struck his farm or household by transferring the dead thing to another's land, thus forcing the evil 'penalty' to follow it. Or, even more simply, he can merely transfer an egg, a potato, the hearth ashes, of his own threatened household to another's land or garden, and the danger goes with them. These practices drive off the 'good people'.

Similarly, when any of the household goods fall into another's possession, there is danger ahead for the household whose integrity is so broken. If butter fails, borrowed hearth-coals, or tools, or milk may hold the cause. One has merely to find the missing bit of goods, restore it to its rightful place, and thus restore the breach through which the good people have made their dangerous entrance into the life of one's family group and its possessions.

Naturally, then, transfer of this sort is dangerous

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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to the persons to whose land the object is transferred. Consequently, the fearsome 'pisherogues' of black magic often take this form. An egg, a potato, a wand of hazel or thorn mysteriously found in one's own garden is evidence of witchcraft, and danger for one's land and stock and family. That the reason ascribed to the outbreak of ill-luck may be arrived at after the fact, makes it none the less compelling. Belief is a social habit which events confirm.

I shall give you two examples, one of them about a dead thing, and another where simple, homely household objects come to have supernatural power. The first is the account a shopkeeper in a country town gave of a countryman-customer of his. "A countryman came into the shop one day and I asked him how things were going. Bad, said he, he was after losing three cows. I asked how was that, and Martin said it was the 'pisherogues'. He was working down in the bog and found the carcass of a cow there. What did you do with it? I asked him. He left it there, said himself. He was not going to move it for fear of the 'pisherogues'. Didn't they carry it there to put the curse on him, and wasn't it the next week his own cows sickened and died? . . . Then I was asking him, why didn't you get a vet, man? Sure, he said, why should I throw good money after a vet, and I knowing very well what happened to them?"

The second example is an account of disaster and

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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its happy termination from a farmer who told the story in a traditional vein, but whose own record of actuality it is. I might say that the role of the curate in the episode was probably very different from that which the countryman imagined it to be.

"A fellow he knows was hilling potatoes and he got three young fellows to help him. Each of them found an egg in the garden, one a hen's egg, the second a goose egg, the third a turkey's egg. [He told this with great dramatic effect.] Well, the man hadn't any poultry on his farm at all.

"The boys went home and told their mothers, and the women told other women about it till it got all round the parish. The curate heard of it and one day he went over to the farmer and stopped in. They talked about all sorts of other things, and finally the curate said, I am sorry for you. Why? said himself. Because you are going to have bad luck. And he told him about the eggs.

"Well, the farmer had terrible hardships. His stock died on him, he'd go out in the morning and find his ewes dead on their backs with their legs in the air and lambs dropped dead out of their wombs. He had five cows in calf and after that spring he had only one cow left. A pig died on him, and his sister took sick, like to die herself she was. [After a time] the curate came . . . and he held masses in the farmer's house.

"He's doing well again now and has a fine lot of stock. That was about four years ago."

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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Here then one can see a new kind of incorporation of the values of the countryman's life into belief. The goods round which his interests are centred come to be either beneficial or dangerous to the group to which he belongs, depending upon their connection with it in the critical situations which threaten disease and disaster. Ordinarily, there is nothing supernatural or dangerous about an egg or a hazel-stick, to the countryman. But in these special situations, in which tradition comes to his rescue, they take on a wholly different character. Thus we have the seemingly paradoxical case that the things of greatest 'power' are not by any means always the wondrous, unusual, and fearsome things, but the homely articles of use and familiar associations. Iron cures, but iron is not mysterious. An egg becomes a sign of witchcraft; a pinch of salt protects one against evil; but neither are fearsome things in themselves. Yet in critical circumstances they have the power to heal, to hurt, to cure, to destroy.

For what the countryman's belief is doing for him is something belief always seems destined to do, wherever it is found. Tradition is bearing upon him to keep alive and organize the regard his group must feel for the codes of conduct and the objects of use by which it lives. Belief focuses his attention and his emotions upon them. It gives sanctity to his conventions, his needs, and his goods. It infuses them with emotional associations far beyond

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Archæology (July, 1940) by I. R. Crozier and L. C. Rea, entitled "Bullauns and other Basin-stones," summarizes the various beliefs connected with cup-holes and the larger "bullauns" or stone basins, which the authors suggest were made in the same way by gradual ceremonial attrition. The water which accumulates in these artificial hollows is considered to possess special virtues, for instance as a cure for warts, and offerings of pins and coins are often made in them. It is significant that some of the basins seem to have served as fonts in the early churches. (Fig. III.) Small boulders

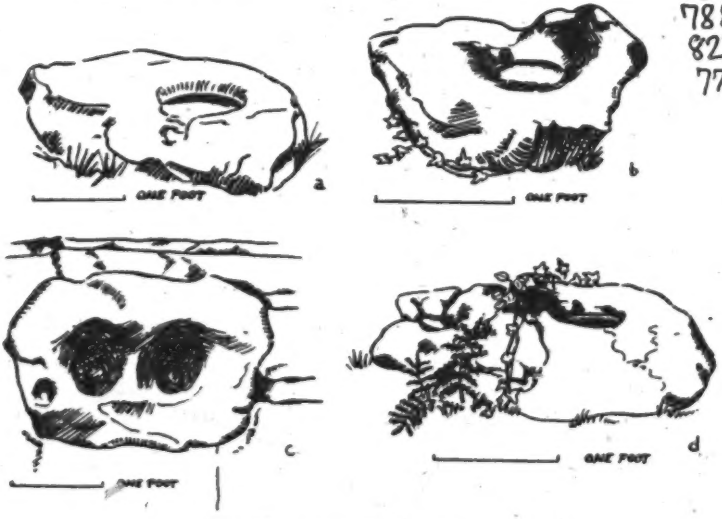

Fig. III. Bullauns.

(*a*) Portmore Church, Co. Antrim.
(*b* & *d*) Aghalee, Co. Antrim (basins on both sides of the same stone).
(*c*) "St. Columba's Font," Londonderry. (Two bullauns and a cup-mark.

lying in certain basin-stones are occasionally employed as cursing stones, the ritual consisting of turning the stones against the sun in their holes—there may be as many as ten in one boulder—at the same time uttering a curse against the offending person;

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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171 524 American Indians is the buzz, a rectangular piece of wood or a circular disc of metal which is rotated on a twisted string, by drawing the hands apart, to produce a buzzing sound. It is recorded that the young weavers of 19th century Belfast were fond of playing with the "bummer," and I saw the toy, called a "snorer," in use in north-east Antrim this summer.

857 524 Many examples could be given of children's games and rhymes which retain memories of ancient rites. Thus it has been suggested that the game known as "Draw a pail of water" is "the attenuated survival of the religious rite of water worship." Similarly there are hints of foundation sacrifice in "the Devil's Bridge," of marriage by capture in "Nuts in May," of marriage by purchase in "Lords from Spain" and of funeral rites in "Jeannie Jo" and "Green Gravel." These games are not necessarily long established in Ireland—some of them were probably introduced by planters, as in the Appalachian region of the U.S.A.—but they are of wide occurrence and considerable age in other parts of Europe. 754 It is worth putting on record that the aid of magic is still sought in causing illness by making and injuring a wax model of someone to whom ill is wished. It is not five years since a case which resulted in death occurred within a short distance 789 of Belfast. I have no doubt that instances of curious love 821 charms, of raising a wind and so on could still be found, though the old method of burying a black hen alive to bring a fair wind is probably forgotten. The so-called "protective formulæ" such as "God bless the work" and "I wish you luck of the baste" are common currency.

241 289 Harvest customs that deserve mention are the cutting of the last sheaf and the wearing of harvest knots. In the north of Ireland, as in many other parts of Europe, it was customary, so long as sickles were the reaping tools—the practice became modified with the use of scythes—for the harvesters to fling their hooks at the last plaited remnant of standing corn. This was known under various names such as neck, churn, hare, granny, carline and cailleach or "collya."

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

777 bless it," and any evil or illness happens afterwards, the chances are that the blame will be put on the "bad eye." The evil-eye may be
[788] rendered harmless by making the sign of the cross in the name of the Trinity.

There is an old woman in Bofin who is considered to be a witch,
● 754 and is said to be in the habit of putting the "bad eye" on people and on domestic animals.

825 There are several beliefs about beasts and birds, such as that the
821 barnacles on the logs of drift wood, which often come ashore, develop into geese, and that a gale of wind may be brought on by the simple expedient of putting a black cat under a pot. Seals are thought to be enchanted men, and will dive if they see a priest or a man in a black coat; their appearance is said to portend bad weather. Who these
825 enchanted men were, and by whom they were placed under the enchantment, I could not ascertain, but the following mention of this belief is made in a footnote by the late Mr. Hardiman, in his edition of O'Flaherty's "H'Iar Connaught" (p. 27):—

"Many traditions, connecting these harmless animals with the marvellous, are related along our western shores. Among these there is one of a curious nature, viz. that at some distant period of time several of the Clan Coneelys (Mac Conġaile), an old family of Iar Connaught, were by "Art magick," metamorphosed into seals! In some places the story has its believers, who would no more kill a seal or eat of a slaughtered one than they would of a human Coneely. It
[551] is related as a fact that this ridiculous story has caused several of the clan to change their name to Conolly."

776 Fairies are firmly believed in by many, and one man who is subject to epileptic fits relates long stories of his dealings with them.

Many tales are told about them and their doings, but few of them can be collected by a stranger, as the people are very reticent on the subject. They are supposed to exercise a malign influence on infants, especially before baptism, stealing them if good-looking, and supplying their places with puny, wizened changelings. These are got rid of, and the true child recovered by very simple means; it is only necessary to light a large fire and put on the pot to boil, and then to threaten the changeling that he will be boiled, when he will vanish, and the lost child be found in his place.

[775] Woman who die in childbirth or from puerperal fever are believed to be carried away by the fairies to act as wet-nurses.

776 Mrs. Allies informed me that her baby is regularly spat upon by
854 the people when its nurse takes it out, in order to keep off the fairies

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

243 heads of corn at the wrong end, or they would be missed in thrashing with the flail, and for the same reason the ears of the straw band-knot should lie towards the top of the sheaf. The sheaves should be laid with their butts to the wind, for these need most drying. The bands should be tied with nice judgement, tight but not over-tight: one should not be able to put the toe of one's boot under the band when one stands on the butt of the sheaf.

[461] As in all farming operations conducted in traditional ways, music and magic to ease the labour were part of the scene. There were shearing songs to match the rhythm of the sickle, [825] and its efficiency was improved by keeping a fly or other insect imprisoned in the handle; perhaps its incessant activity was meant to speed up the work. Another strange belief was that [777] luck followed the reaper who carried a child on his back. The world of magic and fairy was close by at harvest time: it was believed that the top grain (pickle) of every stalk of corn was empty because it had been taken by the fairies and was their due. The sheaf had its share of lore, too, related possibly to its [754] semblance of human shape. A curse could be worked by sticking pins into the joints of the straw, and the sheaf might be properly waked and buried so that as it withered the object of the curse would decline. Stooks with their 'hudders' (Fig. 51) (hooding sheaves) also take on human forms, and I have known various terms for these large stooks applied as nicknames to broad-based country women. 'The last sheaf' also is known as the cailleach or hag.

Beliefs and customs connected with the last sheaf are legion and find their counterparts in many parts of the world. 'Winning the churn' was an incentive to the reaper, for good luck attended those who had their rigs sheared quickly if only because they avoided the ill-luck of being last. Stories are told of rigs being left unclaimed and uncut because their owners feared to incur 'the famine of the farm', of having the hag to feed until next harvest. The basis of this belief was that the last sheaf was sometimes hidden overnight in the corn of lazy farmers, who would watch at nights and reap by moonlight to avoid what was an omen of misfortune or death.

[787] The last handful of standing corn, selected for the purpose,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

believe that many examples were ground out in much the same way before the sign of the cross replaced that of the circle. Cup-marked stones are commonly found in megalithic graves, on standing stones and Bronze Age cists, both in the British Isles and further afield. Some of the larger bullauns were certainly mortars, and very similar 'knocking stones' were used until recent times for preparing barley meal by pounding the grain with a beetle or maul (Fig. 90). To judge from the frequency with which one finds a knocking stone in the ruins of an old clachan it was one of the communal possessions of such a settlement. Old specimens, more especially when the basins are sunk in an outcrop of rock, are frequently found to hold water, and they are then regarded as 'wells', the water being held efficacious as a cure for warts. That such rock-basins have magic powers is illustrated by the following reference to a site in Scotland. On the Loch Avon side of Cairngorm is a shelving rock bearing hand-made basins about a foot wide and correspondingly deep: 'sitting on them is said to be efficacious in cases of barrenness.'[1]

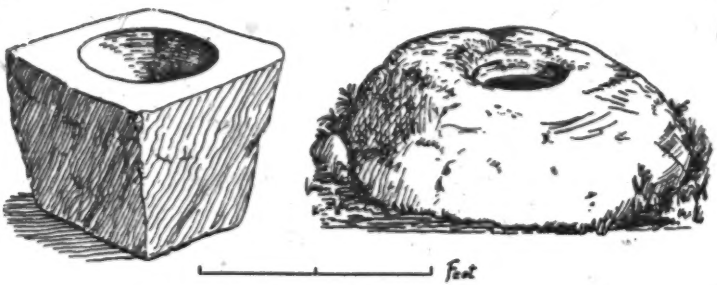

FIG. 90. Knocking stone and bullaun. Both Co. Antrim.

It is an interesting illustration of the pagan associations of cup-marks, and of the success of the symbol of the cross, that their use survived in folk practice only as cursing stones. Smooth pebbles resting in certain stone basins are turned three times against the sun. There are many examples in the west, some

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 265.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

754 occurring on natural rock outcrops (Fig. 91), others ground into stone slabs resting on built-up foundations and termed altars, as at Inishmurray off the coast of Sligo. I have little doubt that they were the communal mortars of pre-Christian settlements. Their utilization as cursing stones continued into recent times. I was told of the example illustrated at Killinagh in Co. Cavan, that 'you would think twice before turning the stones, because the curse would come back on you unless the

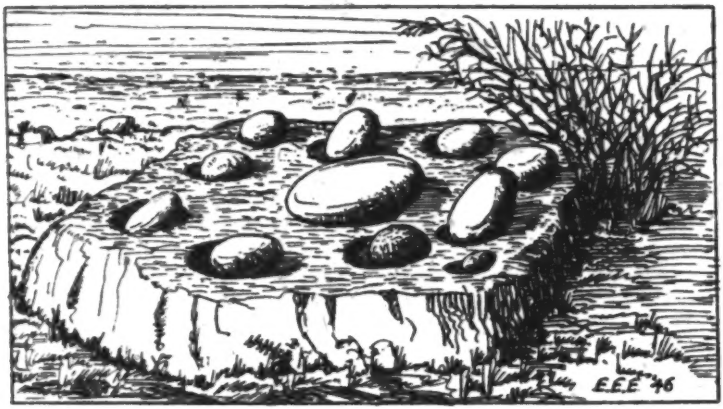

FIG. 91. Cursing stones by Upper Lough Macnean at Killinagh, Co. Cavan. (For scale, the large central stone measures 15 in. by 12 in.)

cause was just'. At many holy wells curiously shaped stones
823 were regarded as having curative powers, and they were bor-
755 rowed for use by people too ill to visit the well. At St. Olan's Well, Dromatimore, Co. Cork, the rounds include visits to the saint's Cap and Stone. The former is an oval quartzite stone which rests on an ogham-inscribed monolith and which replaces one, removed by the parish priest a century ago, which was invested with magical properties. 'It was said to be an unfailing talisman, and was much sought after for various feminine ailments, particularly maternity cases. If worn on the head and carried three times round the church it was said to cure the most violent headaches and, in addition, it had the gift of locomotion in that, if removed to any distance, it unfailingly

16:Messenger E-4,5. (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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172
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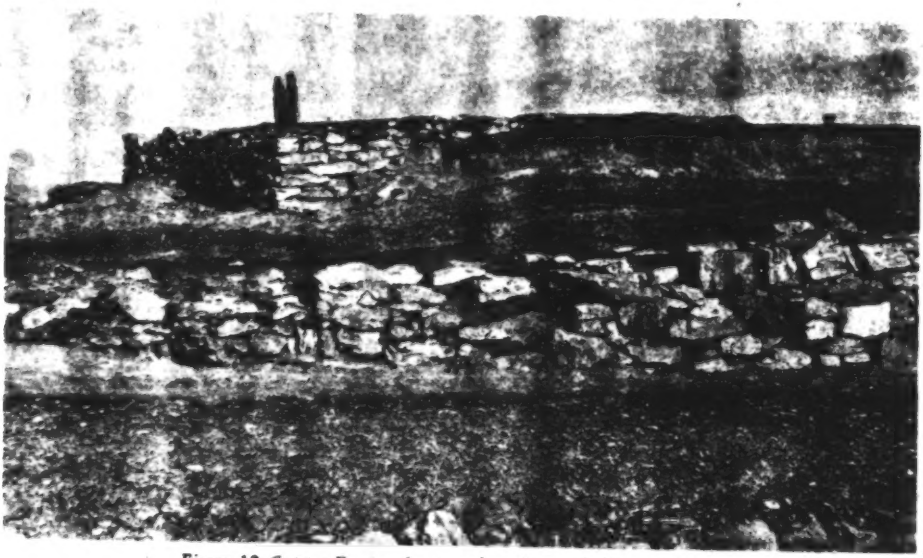

Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pookah

776 [771] black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37–38).

764 178 Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies, she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch, she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this expediency.

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754 [624] [576] Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

misfortune to those whom he compliments. The extent of his power is measured by how soon after the compliment his victim suffers, and how serious is the calamity. Most feared of recent witches is a man who as a youth caused a newly arrived curate on his first walk of the island to fall and break his leg; within seconds after the boy praised the vigorous stride of the priest, "the poor creature disappeared behind a fence, feet over head." The folk seldom compliment one another, and when they do they append "God bless you." to the statement as a precautionary incantation. Persons with the evil eye neglect to do this, it is said. I often have wondered—when in a mood to credit the existence of fairies which turn on water faucets in the dead of night—if a series of misfortunes which befell me during 1960 and 1961 was somehow linked to one of these persons wishing me a good year, without uttering "God bless you.", as my wife and I put off the strand in a canoe at the end of our research. The same incantation is voiced by those in the vicinity of one who sneezes—in this case to prevent his soul from being captured by the fairies. It is tempting to attribute the unwillingness of Irish peasants generally to pay compliments to the age-old but now forgotten dread of being accused of the evil eye and of inviting fairies and hag witches to substitute changelings for human children.

Priests of the church at least a century ago rid Inis Beag of most religious practitioners of pagan disposition, but there is evidence that before their acculturative influence was felt diviners and workers of good and evil magic practiced techniques which had their roots in the Iron Age. Divining now is restricted mostly to the seeking of omens by everyone, and the astrological and tea leaf reading skills of several persons who do not charge for their services. The principal workers of magic in the past were herbalists, animal doctors, and bone setters; an animal doctor in Inis Beag and a bone setter in a nearby island still ply their inherited specialties for pay, but both men claim that they are practical folk physicians and do not command pagan or Christian spiritual powers. Just as the islanders share a common body of omens which are used to avoid the misfortunes and compound the benefits in store for them, they also share a common knowledge of folk medicines, which some believe to be more efficacious than the medicines provided by doctor and nurse. Indigenous medicines once were prescribed by workers of magic, misnamed "herb witches"—old women who gathered plants at dawn and "brewed" them in a variety of ways to affect various cures. The dew on the plants, as well as the manner in which they were compounded, gave these medicines a magical potency. To meet such a witch as she was returning from collecting ingredients meant that one was doomed to take on the affliction of the patient being treated by the hag. A similar belief, well represented in the folklore of the islanders, is the transference of disease from a human being to an animal that he has befriended earlier.

Christian and Pagan Reinterpretations

The four quarterly festivals of the Celts were: Imbolc, celebrated on February 1st, Beltaine on May 1st, Lughnasa on August 1st, and Samhain on November 1st.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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times are recognized as recently deceased islanders, but more often they are 775
"strangers" from another generation or another region of Ireland. They appear and disappear without warning and travel silently singly or in small groups. Usually they pay little or no heed to the living who chance to observe them, but they will attack those who have wronged them and occasionally others for seemingly no reason. A man told me of being beaten severely by three unknown men, obviously shades, early one evening at the back of the island; he might have been killed but for the intervention of two women, also strangers to him. At one time, persons who feared being assaulted by vengeful or capricious ghosts carried coals to protect themselves. The folk believe that shades are souls of the dead in Purgatory, which embraces the earth as well as a spiritual locus. While on earth, they do [783]
penance by laboring at economic tasks—carrying seaweed, planting gardens, and fishing—near their former homes, and the work that they accomplish is undone once they disappear.

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Christianity touches on the evil eye in more ways than providing the 776
magical incantation, "God bless you.", which automatically opposes the power of 754 •
God to that of the witch. Many islanders explain the evil eye by positing the 178
presence of both the deity and the Devil in each human body. God rests on the 826
right side and urges a person to do good deeds, while Satan rests on the left and tempts him to commit sins. In most individuals, the deity dominates the body much of the time, but in the case of one with the evil eye, the Devil somehow has gained perpetual ascendancy and transmits his destructive power through the left eye of the person. It is the constant flowing of malignant power from within which causes the disfigurement in or near the left eye of the witch. The association [822]
of evil with the left is a phenomenon widely distributed among the peoples of the world, as is the linking of evil with black. Ghost masks are painted black to [171]
symbolize their evil nature by the Anang of Nigeria, and sacrifices to deity and ancestors at shrines are made with the right hand, and to ghosts, witches, and the spirit of sorcery with the left. In Inis Beag, people who have swarthy skin, black 826
hair, and brown eyes, although not considered witches, are thought to possess evil 828
power of some sort and are to be avoided. A curate possessing these physical traits 754
who served in the island recently was mistrusted and shunned whenever possible [793]
even though "a man chosen by God Almighty." An interesting conjecture is how successful would be the research in Inis Beag of an anthropologist with dark complexion and hair and a cast in his brown left eye.

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The afterworld of the Celts, known as the Isle of the Blest or the Land of 772
Youth, lay to the west of Ireland. It has been sighted by a few fortunate Inis Beag fishermen, either low-lying on the horizon with lights sparkling when it has risen from the sea, as it does periodically, or in the ocean deeps with the spires of its buildings and their tolling bells near the surface. This is a forested land inhabited by souls of the dead, and by fairies who travel to and from the mainland in "fairy ships." Few islanders now syncretize the Isle of the Blest with the Christian Heaven, as was common a century ago, but there are those who claim to have seen fairy ships from there skirt Inis Beag headed for the mainland. These are masted schooners carrying lights with no signs of life on their decks, which heave into sight and vanish instantaneously and can move far more swiftly than their counter-

later on, particularly in those families where competition for the inheritance of property is engendered among siblings by the fathers' attempts to ensure favored treatment in old age.

Men are far more active socially than are women. The latter are restricted by custom mostly to visiting, attending parties during the winter, and participating in church-associated activities. Many women leave their cottages only to attend mass, wakes, and funerals or to make infrequent calls on relatives; my wife and I talked with some elderly women who had not visited other villages or walked to the back of the island for thirty or more years. Men not only attend parties with their womenfolk but go to dances during the summer, frequent the pubs, play cards almost nightly during November and December (the period when once people congregated to hear storytellers), visit the homes of kin and friends or meet along the trails at night, and range the entire island and the sea about it in their economic pursuits. Before the age of benevolent government, women shared many economic tasks with men, such as collecting seaweed, baiting lines, and gutting fish. But now they tend to household chores and only milk cows and perform some of the lighter farming jobs with their fathers and husbands.

The island folk are devout Catholics, despite the fact that they are critical of their priests and hold pagan religious beliefs. Youth of Inis Beag overtly disallow the existence of other than church-approved supernatural entities. However, their elders cling to traditional pagan beliefs and practices (many of which are Druidic in origin) about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical neighbors. The non-Christian array of spiritual beings includes various spirits and demons, ghosts, witches, phantom ships, and animals and material objects possessing human attributes and volitions. Prominent among the spirits thought to inhabit Inis Beag are the trooping and solitary fairies, sea creatures, mermaids, and the banshee. The most formidable of the demons is a pooka which lives in a Bronze Age burial mound and roams the strand and common land at night altering its shape and size at will; during the day it will twist the limbs of unwary persons who choose the hill for a resting place. Ghosts, called "shades," are frequently seen after dark performing economic tasks. They are thought to be doing penance in purgatory, which embraces the earth as well as a spiritual locus; this is one example of the many reinterpretations of Christian and pagan belief effected by the islanders. The only form of witchcraft practiced today is the casting of the evil eye. At least three persons, suitably ostracized, are believed to be able to perpetrate evil

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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by the act of complimenting their victims. Other religious retentions found in Inis Beag are a multitude of taboos, divination through the seeking of omens, magical charms and incantations of a protective nature, and an emphasis on "natural" foods, folk medicines, and other products impinging on the human body.

It is believed by many people in Ireland that the Catholicism of the islanders embodies an ideal unattained on the mainland, where the faith is thought to set an example for the world. In fact, the worship of the folk is obsessively oriented toward salvation in the next world, with a corresponding preoccupation with sin in this world; there is a resemblance to polytheism in the manner in which they relate to the Blessed Virgin and Irish saints; Christian as well as pagan rituals and religious artifacts are often employed to serve magical ends; and many beliefs that they hold to be orthodox Catholic are in reality idiosyncratic to Inis Beag or Ireland. Christian morality in its "outward" manifestations is realized to a remarkable degree. This can be attributed, in part, to the emphasis placed on good works as a means of gaining salvation; but, more importantly, it results from the already-mentioned techniques of social control exercised by the clergy, based on an overwhelming fear of damnation.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The most active researchers in Inis Beag have been folklorists. Although ethnology as a discipline is not represented in the national universities and elsewhere in the Republic, folklore in the European humanistic tradition is strongly developed. The deliberate recording of the immense body of Irish folklore, folk beliefs, and folk customs began in the early part of the last century, was spurred by nativism—of which the Gaelic Revival was the main strand, and was institutionalized in the Republic with the formation of, first, the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1926, then the Irish Folklore Institute in 1930, and, finally, the Irish Folklore Commission in 1936 (Delargy 1957). For many years, commission collectors have visited Inis Beag, recording mostly the verbal art and material traits—with their associated behavior—of the island folk. They have not attempted to describe and analyze functionally and dynamically the total culture of the island; their visits have been brief and intermit-